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*Chamber Music Society*

*presents*

# The Avalon String Quartet



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# The Avalon String Quartet

Blaise Magnière, violin • Marie Wang, violin  
Antony Devroye, viola • Cheng-Hou Lee, cello

Described by the Chicago Tribune as “an ensemble that invites you – ears, mind, and spirit – into its music,” the Avalon String Quartet has established itself as one of the country’s leading ensembles. Formed in 1995 at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, the Quartet came to the fore after participating in Isaac Stern’s Chamber Music Workshop at Carnegie Hall in 1997. As a result, Mr. Stern invited the Avalon Quartet to perform in the Isaac Stern Chamber Music Encounters in Jerusalem and presented the ensemble’s Carnegie Hall debut at Weill Recital Hall. The quartet captured the top prize at the ARD Competition in Munich (2000) as well as the First Prize at Concert Artists Guild Competition in New York (1999).

The Quartet has performed in many of the major halls, including Alice Tully Hall in New York, 92nd St. Y, Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., Wigmore Hall and Herculesaal in Munich. Other performances include appearances at the Caramoor Music Festival in NY, La Jolla Chamber Music Society, NPR’s St. Paul Sunday Radio, Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, Isabella Gardner Museum, Barge Music, Dame Myra Hess, and the Ravinia Festival.

The quartet is in residence at Northern Illinois University, a position formerly occupied by the distinguished Vermeer Quartet. As a part of their residency, they perform four programs annually in Chicago and DeKalb, and the members teach individual studios and coach chamber music at the school. This follows previous residencies at the

Juilliard School and at Indiana University South Bend.

Dedicated educators, the Avalon Quartet has taught at the Interlochen Quartet Institute, Madeline Island Music Camp, Icicle Creek Music Festival, the Britten-Pears School in England, and the Juilliard School. The quartet is also dedicated to outreach in various communities, including work-



ing with school districts in Los Angeles, Chicago, the Center for Abused Children in Hartford, as well as with the Music for Youth Organization in Connecticut.

In 2010 the quartet released a CD of contemporary American works on the Albany label to much critical acclaim. The Avalon Quartet’s debut CD, *Dawn to Dusk*, including the Ravel and the Janacek Second Quartets, was honored with the 2002 Chamber Music America/WQXR Record Award for best chamber music recording.

The Quartet’s live performances and conversation have been featured on Chicago’s WFMT-FM, New York’s WQXR-FM and WNYC-FM, National Public Radio’s “Performance Today”, Canada’s CBC, Australia’s ABC, the ARD of Germany and France Musique.

# *Program*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

*String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6*

*Allegro con brio*

*Adagio, ma non troppo*

*Scherzo: Allegro*

*La Malinconia: Adagio; Allegretto quasi allegro*

HAROLD MELTZER (1966-)

*Aqua (2011)*

Commission from the Barlow Endowment  
at Brigham Young University



*Intermission*



JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

*String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2*

*Allegro non troppo*

*Andante moderato*

*Quasi Minuetto, moderato*

*Finale; Allegro non assai*

# Program Notes

## Ludwig van Beethoven String Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6

Born in Bonn in 1770, Ludwig van Beethoven displayed his musical talents at an early age and was taught by, among others, his father Johann van Beethoven. Ludwig Beethoven moved to Vienna in 1792 and began studying form and counterpoint with Haydn and later with Salieri. There he quickly gained a reputation as a conductor and virtuoso pianist. Around 1796, Beethoven began to lose his hearing and as early as 1801, he wrote to friends describing his symptoms and the difficulties they caused in both professional and social settings. Beethoven lived in Vienna until his death in 1827.

While Beethoven earned income from publication of his works and from public performances, he also depended on the generosity of patrons for income. He gave them private performances and copies of works they commissioned for an exclusive period prior to publication. Along with symphonies, concerti, an opera, masses, and sonatas, Beethoven also wrote a significant quantity of chamber music: string quartets, string quintets, piano trios, string trios, and works for various combinations of wind instruments.

In his early period, Beethoven composed his first six string quartets (*Op. 18*). Commissioned by and dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz, they were published in 1801. These quartets are thought to demonstrate his total mastery of the classical string quartet as developed by Haydn and Mozart. He took the three-movement sonata of Haydn and Mozart and expanded its scope and ambition into a four-movement work. *The String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 18, no. 6*, also known as “La Malinconia”, was actually the fifth work composed.

The first movement, in the sonata form, starts with a conversation between the first violin and the cello. Eventually, the movement ends without a coda. The first violin begins the second movement with a lyrical melody in 2/4 time. The mood shifts with the move to a minor key and unexpected accents and silences. The Scherzo has been described as a “tour de force of syncopation”. The fourth movement is the crux of the piece and possibly the highlight of *Op. 18*. It is marked “to be played with the greatest refinement”. It is from this movement that the quartet’s sub-title La Malinconia (Melancholy) derives. In his *Guide to Chamber Music* (1985), Melvin Berger comments: “From the point of view of musical development, this introduction is decades ahead of the rest of *Op. 18*. In some ways it presages the Late Quartets of the 1820s, with its moving evocation of grief and despair; it provides, as well, an insight into the depths of Beethoven’s emotional state.” “La Malinconia” is a reminder of the composer’s personal tragedy.

## Harold Meltzer • Aqua

Harold Meltzer was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1966. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Amherst College, and then from King’s College, University of Cambridge and the Yale School of Music. He also attended Columbia Law School and practiced law for several years. While in graduate school he co-founded the contemporary performance ensemble SEQUITUR, and he remains

its co-Artistic Director. Meltzer has served as resident composer at the Wellesley Composers Conference, the Bennington Chamber Music Conference, the Seal Bay Festival of American Chamber Music, Shakespeare & Company, and the Colonial Symphony, and taught at Vassar College and Yale University. Currently he teaches at Amherst College, where he is the James E. and Grace W. Valentine Visiting Associate Professor of Music.

The recipient of many awards, Meltzer was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2009, and received the Rome Prize, the Barlow Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The first recording devoted to Meltzer's music was released in 2010 by Naxos on its American Classics label and was named one of the CDs of the year by *The New York Times*, *Fanfare Magazine*, and *American Record Guide*.

Harold Meltzer wrote this about his most recent work, *Aqua*. "A Paul Goldberger piece in *The New Yorker* magazine introduced me to architect Jeanne Gang's mesmerizing Aqua Tower in Chicago. Goldberger begins his description: 'Aqua—a new, eighty-two-story apartment tower in the center of Chicago—is made of the same tough, brawny materials as most skyscrapers: metal, concrete, and lots of glass. But the architect, Jeanne Gang, a forty-five-year-old Chicagoan, has figured out a way to give it soft, silky, lines, like draped fabric... You know this tower is huge and solid, but it feels malleable, its exterior pulsing with a gentle rhythm.' I collected photographs of the skyscraper, from different vantage points, in different light. And in April 2011, the quartet already well underway, I was in Chicago, walking around and around the building. The interconnected episodes of the string quartet work at replicating both the building's rippling surface and its 'brawny materials'."

## Johannes Brahms • String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51. No 2

Born in Hamburg in 1833, Johannes Brahms studied piano from the age of seven. Although his works include symphonies, concertos, many varieties of chamber music, as well as choral works and lieder, he was best known during his lifetime as a pianist and conductor. A list of his friends and acquaintances reads like an encyclopedia of nineteenth century music.

Brahms regarded the string quartet as a particularly important genre. While his quartets have enjoyed less popularity than some of his other chamber music, they helped revitalize a form that had stagnated after Beethoven and Schubert and served as inspiration for the quartets of Schoenberg, Bartok and other twentieth century composers.

Dedicated to his friend, the surgeon Theodor Billroth, Brahms's *String Quartets No. 1 in C minor* and *No. 2 in A minor* were completed in Tutzing, Bavaria and published together as *Opus 51*. Brahms was slow in writing his first two string quartets and apparently had written many others that he destroyed because they did not meet his expectations. He worked on the *Opus 51* quartets over an extended period of time and, because he was forty when they were published in 1873, they must be considered mature works. They are in minor keys, dramatic and profound, but as is typical of Brahms, there is great variety within them. During his lifetime, Brahms would compose only one more string quartet a few years later.

An inspiration for a generation of composers and a towering figure in the world of music in the last half of the nineteenth century, Brahms died of cancer in Vienna in 1897.



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